

Afghanistan

February 1982

Background: Following the April 1978 Marxist coup in Afghanistan, internal opposition developed almost immediately and later evolved into a countrywide insurgency. Soviet military assistance increased, and Soviet military equipment and advisers became critical to the new regime's survival. In December 1979, the Soviets invaded the country, engineered a coup against the existing Marxist government, and installed the puppet regime of Babrak Karmal. After more than 2 years of brutal occupation, however, the Soviets have been unable to establish the authority of the Babrak government.

Failure of Soviet occupation: The Soviets have failed to win over a significant number of Afghan collaborators. The regime's narrow political base has shrunk even further over the past 25 months, and the Afghan Army continues to disintegrate. Failure to reconstruct a viable Afghan Army means that the Soviets must bear the major burden of providing security. The dearth of Afghan civilians willing to participate in civilian administration requires the Soviets also to play a dominant role in the government. Politically and militarily, the Soviets control less of the country today than a year ago, and prospects for reversing this situation are not good.

Without Afghan institutions to which they can turn over responsibility, the Soviets face an open-ended military occupation. The nationalists have already denied firm control of most of the countryside to the Soviet occupation force. With vastly superior firepower, the Soviets can engage in punitive expeditions at will but cannot secure territory in the absence of an effective Afghan administrative and military infrastructure. Paradoxically, the lack of any resistance leader with a broad national following may be a source of strength in the present stage of armed resistance. Since their opponent is the Afghan people themselves, the Soviets cannot hope to capture or defeat the thoroughly decentralized enemy.

Soviet position on a settlement: The Soviets have endorsed (and presumably authored) the August 24, 1981 Kabul statement on conditions for a political settlement--an insignificant revision of Kabul's previous (May 14, 1980) proposals. The two concessions were essentially procedural. Key elements remain cessation of outside interference, with international guarantees--in effect a demand that the outside world secure the end of Afghan resistance as a precondition to Soviet withdrawal.

Implications of the Soviet position: The Soviet/Kabul proposals do not address the central requirements for a settlement acceptable to the Afghan people, including the expeditious and total withdrawal of Soviet troops. They are based on the erroneous premise that Pakistan and Iran, aided by China and the West, are the source of "international interference" in Afghanistan. This ignores the crux of the matter: that the 90,000-man Soviet occupying army constitutes the

"international interference" which must be ended if peace is to be restored. The May 14/August 24 proposals would require direct negotiations between the Kabul regime and its neighbors, thus providing international recognition of the Soviet fait accompli in Afghanistan. In short, the international community is being asked to impose an unpopular and illegitimate government on the Afghan people--something the Soviets have been unable to do by force. Even if Soviet conditions for an "external" settlement were met, they insist that withdrawal of their forces take place only with Kabul's "agreement," an unlikely eventuality since that regime could not survive without the Soviet military presence. Significantly, Moscow has never pledged total withdrawal of its forces or offered a timetable for even partial withdrawal.

International initiatives: The international community has refused to accept the Soviet proposals, but there are alternatives:

- The ~~UN~~ General Assembly has overwhelmingly approved three resolutions (January and November 1980, and November 1981) calling for withdrawal of the foreign forces, restoration of Afghanistan's nonalignment, respect for the Afghan right to self-determination, and return of the refugees "with honor." (Majorities were 104, 111, and 116, respectively.) The Soviets opposed all three resolutions.
- In February 1981, the nonaligned movement meeting in New Delhi strongly condemned foreign military presence in Afghanistan and called for its withdrawal.
- In June 1981, the European Community's Council of Ministers put forth a proposal elaborating upon an earlier French initiative. It called for a two-stage conference. The first stage, involving the permanent members of the UN Security Council as well as Pakistan, Iran, India, and representatives of the UN and the Islamic Conference, would determine ways to prevent external intervention in Afghanistan. A second stage, to which representatives of Afghan opinion would be invited, would decide on how to implement agreements worked out during the first stage and on all other matters designed to assure Afghanistan's independence and nonalignment. The Soviets have also rejected this proposal.

UN initiative: In February 1981, then-UN Secretary General Waldheim appointed Perez de Cuellar as his personal representative to seek a political settlement. Perez de Cuellar traveled twice to Kabul and Islamabad and once to Moscow during the year. Subsequently, during the autumn 1981 UN General Assembly, Waldheim and Perez de Cuellar met separately with the Foreign Ministers of Pakistan and Afghanistan and their representatives in New York. Newly elected Secretary General Perez de Cuellar is expected shortly to name his own personal representative who will continue these contacts.

US views: In exchanges with the Soviets, both public and private, the US has stressed its desire to arrive at an acceptable political solution involving withdrawal of Soviet troops. We have told the Soviets that their presence in Afghanistan is a major impediment to improving East-West and US-Soviet relations. While there is as yet no evidence that they are prepared seriously to discuss a genuine political settlement, the costs of their continued occupation are high--on the ground in Afghanistan, in East-West relations, and in their standing in the Third World. The Soviets are involved in a classic effort to suppress what in another context they themselves might call a national liberation struggle. If history elsewhere is any guide, they may yet be forced to permit a restoration of Afghan freedom.